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Korean youth fight for construction of comfort woman statue

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Senior Yeojin Shin and junior Youngjoon Jace Kim delivered speeches at city hall on Oct. 21, raising awareness and support for the construction of a comfort woman monument in front of the Fullerton Museum.

The statutes act as a reminder of the women who were forced into sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers during World War II. A statue has already been placed in Glendale, but protests from the Japanese community have hindered the installation of a statue in Fullerton.

"The city council already approved setting up the monument, but some Japanese residents were opposing it," Shin said.

The students delivered their speeches, hoping to persuade city council members to continue to support the statue's installment, she said.

"Japanese American citizens were against the construction [of the monument] because they don't want to admit their faults in starting human trafficking during wartime when they brought young Asian women to Japan as sex slaves," Kim said.

The students also received some criticism from older community members for speaking about the statue's construction, he said. Some elders felt young teenagers could not know the pain of comfort women or fully understand the history behind the statue.

"As a Korean American, I believe that I have a voice in changing falsity," Kim said. "Future generations should learn from this incident to prevent another atrocity like this."

Through this experience, he was able to voice his opinions on this issue and learn more about Korean history, he said.

"I'm really interested in history, and the issue [of the statutes] was one of the main volunteer works that I do for our organization, Future Young Leaders of America [FYLA]," Shin said.

Volunteers worked to collect signatures from Korean Americans and other residents of Fullerton and Los Angeles, she said. These signatures and petition were presented to the city council.

"I think that all Koreans, all people, should know about this event, because it is one of the most important events in our [Korean] history, Shin said. It is important to remember these events so we do not repeat them again, she said.

"There were actually some Korean Americans who thought that our effort would not change anything, and that it is worthless," Shin said. "That threw us off, but we were determined to deliver our message."

However, many people learned through the statues' installation, Shin said.

"Even though the speech was short, I was proud that I expressed myself in front of city council members of Fullerton and the citizens," Kim said. "I gained confidence and will to end human trafficking, which is [still] an issue around the world today."